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COUNTERING RUSSIAN ACTIVE MEASURES

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science Degree in Joint Campaign Planning and Strategy. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Joint Forces Staff College or the Department of Defense.

This paper is entirely my own work except as documented in footnotes. (or appropriate statement per the Academic Integrity Policy)

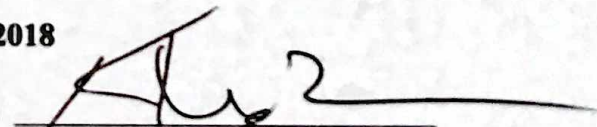
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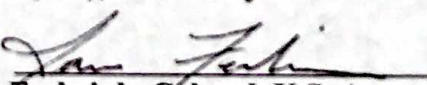
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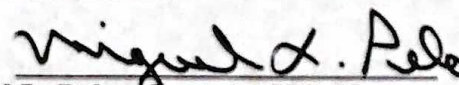
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Abstract

Since 2008, a revanchist Russia has sought to reassert itself as a superpower in the international community. In this quest, Russia has revived Soviet-era political warfare, known as active measures (*aktivnyye meropriatii*), to advance its political objectives without resorting to armed conflict. Russia has masterfully adapted the shrewd techniques of Soviet active measures campaigns to the modern strategic environment with incredible success and kept Western leaders on their heels as Russia expands its sphere of influence. This thesis proposes a foundation for a strategic approach to counter Russian active measures by defining Soviet and Russian political warfare, analyzing how Russia has adapted Soviet active measures activities to modern times, and addressing potential vulnerabilities.

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Introduction: Resurgence of Tensions

On February 12, 2007, Russian President Vladimir Putin delivered a speech at the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy, where he accused the US of imposing its economic, political, cultural, and educational policies on other nations, and of pursuing unilateral and illegitimate military actions that resulted in extensive human suffering. Putin then accused NATO of pursuing an expansionist agenda, despite the assurances given to Russia after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact that there would be no expansion into eastern Europe. Putin criticized the Western notion that legitimacy for military action could be granted by either NATO, or the European Union (EU), and stressed that only the United Nations could legitimize military actions.¹

The West did not take heed of Putin's concerns, and by 2009, NATO had admitted all former Warsaw Pact countries and every eastern European former Soviet satellite republic except Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova. While the US signaled its intent to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty and place an ABM platform in Europe, NATO also ignored Russia as it developed a post-Cold War Euro-Atlantic security architecture.² Today, the 2015 Russian National Security Strategy lists NATO expansion and the US ABM platforms in Romania and Poland as primary threats to its national security.³

¹ Vladimir Putin, "Prepared Remarks at the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy" (speech, Munich, Germany, February 10, 2017).

² Eugene Rumer, *Russia and the Security of Europe* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016), 39.

³ The Russian Federation, *The Russian Federation National Security Strategy*, 2015, <http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf>, accessed 1 September 2017.

Russian leaders have viewed the economic expansion of the EU with similar concern, especially the requirements for fighting corruption and pursuing political and economic reform.⁴ Soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's new oligarchs took advantage of the weak democratic institutions and nonexistent monitoring systems in central and eastern Europe to foster corrupt networks that benefitted them financially.⁵ These oligarchs, who also play an important role in Russian governance, continue to utilize their business and financial networks to exert influence in central and eastern Europe, where EU programs have threatened these quasi-legal and quasi-political organizations.

Russia and the West grew further apart politically as Russia devolved to a combination of illiberal democracy and oligarchic capitalism between 2002 and 2008. Western criticism intensified as Putin consolidated power and turned to a more authoritarian style, rejecting the West's promotion of democracy inside Russia and in countries along its periphery, declaring it as interference with Russia's sovereignty.⁶ The West's support of the color revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia only heightened the perception of a threat to Russian sovereignty. Russia flexed its military and political muscle by invading and establishing a military presence in South Ossetia in 2007. In a televised speech shortly thereafter, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev sent a clear message by designating the countries around Russia's borders to be part of Russia's

⁴ Rumer, 12.

⁵ Heather A. Conley, James Mina, Ruslan Stefanov and Martin Vladimirov, *The Kremlin Playbook: Understanding Russian Influence in Central and Eastern Europe* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2016) v.

⁶ Rumer, 10.

“privileged sphere of influence.”⁷ Russia codified this so-called privileged sphere of influence in its 2015 National Security Strategy.⁸

⁷ Andrew E. Kramer, “Russia Claims Its Sphere of Influence in the World,” *The New York Times*, August 31, 2008, accessed 29 October 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/01/world/europe/01russia.html>.

⁸ The Russian Federation National Security Strategy, 2015.

Chapter 1: Resurgence of Political Warfare

Western actions since the fall of the Soviet Union appeared to have reinforced the fundamental premise of the Marxist-Leninist world view, that “in a world of differing social systems, war and conflict are the normal state of affairs; peace is the exception.”¹ Even through periods of reduced tensions such as détente in the 1970s, the Soviet Union considered itself in continual conflict with the West. Today, at odds politically, militarily, and economically, Russia and the West appear to be in the same state of continual conflict, with Russia pursuing this conflict with the same shrewd techniques as the Soviet Union did. During the Cold War, scholars dubbed these techniques as a manifestation of political warfare; the Soviets called them *aktivnyye meropriatii*, or active measures.

During the Cold War, political warfare was the Soviet Union’s primary instrument of influence, both unscrupulous and effective, it exploited the vulnerabilities inherent in Western liberal democracies. The Russian Federation has revived this Soviet style of political warfare and masterfully adapted it to the modern world by leveraging new technologies and exploiting existing social and political divisions in the West that have arisen since the end of the Cold War. Russia’s political warfare accomplishments in recent years would arguably have made Soviet leaders green with envy. The traditional goal of both Soviet and modern Russian political warfare has been to undermine the development of democratic institutions, erode the credibility of the established

¹ Joseph L. Nogee and Robert H. Donaldson, *Soviet Foreign Policy Since the End of World War II* (Elmsford, NY: Pergamon Press, 1981), 34.

international order, and frustrate the efforts of US and NATO to maintain collective security in Europe.

Why the West is Again Falling Prey to Political Warfare

In recent years, Western leaders have been staggered by this resurgence of political warfare, and especially by Russia's ability to manipulate Western public opinion and public perception. Mistaking these activities as new and unique, the Western alliance has struggled to respond. Several factors contribute to the inability of the US and its European allies to respond effectively to Russian political warfare:

First, Western governments have failed to frame the problem. Academic papers abound on Russian malign influence, hybrid warfare, and the so-called gray zone, but none have attempted to catalogue and categorize the activities that constitute political warfare and place them in the context of a conscious strategic operational design. Framing and defining the problem is an essential step in developing a coherent strategy against Russian political warfare.

Second, the West has a short-term memory. Russian political warfare is based on the Soviet model of active measures, which the US and its allies faced for nearly 50 years during the Cold War. Contemporary Western literature on Russian political warfare focuses on coining new terms, instead of paying attention to history. A study of Cold War propaganda and psychological operations will reveal the origins of current Russian activities as well as rediscover how the West successfully countered Soviet approaches. The key to countering modern Russian political warfare lies in understanding how the

USSR employed it and how the West countered it. This is old wine in new bottles – a weaker power using an asymmetric approach to gain the advantage.

The lessons of the past are clear, but times have changed: no single governmental entity or organization alone can succeed at countering Russian political warfare. Because this type of warfare incorporates a multitude of global activities executed by all the instruments of Russian national power, an enduring and coordinated multilateral, interagency entity is needed.

Countering Russian Political Warfare

Russian political warfare is not an instrument of war; however, it is an instrument of policy, and therefore, part of an enduring continuum – an indirect approach to achieve national goals short of actual war. Because this indirect approach is part of a continuous strategic asymmetric effort, it cannot be completely halted; however, it can be blunted, negated, and neutralized as part of a process intended to impose increasing cost on Russia, while also limiting Russia's strategic payoff.

This thesis will catalogue and categorize the activities that comprise Russian political warfare and put them in the context of the Russian concept of the spectrum of conflict. Under the rubric of malign activities, parallels will be drawn between current methods of Russian political warfare and Cold War era Soviet active measures to identify the successful Western counterstrategies. A series of case studies will be presented to illustrate how political warfare activities promote and expand the Russian sphere of influence, support Russian foreign policy objectives, and prepare the environment for potential irregular and conventional warfare activities when, and if, opportunities arise.

An analysis of these case studies will show those aspects of Russian political warfare that are vulnerable to targeting. Finally, a strategic approach will be offered to counter key aspects of Russian political warfare to deny or frustrate the attainment of Russian strategic objectives.

Chapter 2: Defining Political Warfare

Both strategists and academics have described contemporary Russian malign activities using a myriad of labels, such as gray zone conflict, malign influence activities, and hybrid warfare. Nearly all Russian action, whether covert, clandestine, overt, military, political, economic, or informational, has been given one (or more) of the three terms above. These current efforts to define contemporary Russian malign activities implies that what Russia is doing is a new phenomenon, when in reality, Russia has been conducting these type of activities as part of their foreign policy since 1917. Bundling Russian malign activities under one (or more) vague terms ignores the unique characteristics of the various approaches being employed. It is essential to, first, define specific activities, and second, identify and examine the purpose and characteristics of each. Once defined and understood, a counter strategy for each activity can be developed.

In 1948, George Kennan defined political warfare as the employment of all means at a nation's command, overt and covert, short of war, to achieve its national objectives – to further its influence and authority and to weaken those of its adversaries.¹ In 1984, Richard Shultz and Roy Godson defined political warfare as the threat to employ, or the actual employment of, overt and covert political, economic, and military techniques to influence politics and events in foreign countries.² Both definitions will serve as the foundation for examining the Russian strategy.

¹ George F. Kennan, "The Inauguration of Political Warfare," US Department of State Policy Planning Staff memorandum to the National Security Council, April 30, 1948 (accessed on November 24, 2017), <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114320>.

² Richard H. Shultz and Roy Godson, *Dezinformatsia: Active Measures in Soviet Strategy* (McLean, VA: Pergamon Press, 1984), 13.

Even though it includes *all means short of war*, Kennan's definition does not identify a key element: the intent to influence a foreign entity. In a modern world, where globalization has relegated Clausewitzian war to the bench, *all means short of war* would encompass every activity imaginable. By not stressing the intent to influence, Kennan's definition of political warfare could describe any nation's policy. Shultz and Godson address the intent to influence in their definition, but they narrow the ends of political warfare too far by stating that the objective is *to influence politics and events in foreign countries*. Political warfare can influence every aspect of a state's activities and interests, not just its politics and events. Both definitions also need updating, as in today's world, political warfare seeks to influence not just state or non-state actors, but also a target population.

A refined definition of political warfare contains aspects of Kennan, Shultz, and Godson's definitions and adds state and non-state actors. For the purposes of this paper, political warfare will be defined as a method of persistent conflict, characterized by the employment of the elements of national power, in an overt or covert manner, short of armed violence, with the intent to influence a state, non-state, or target population in support of national objectives.³ The goal of political warfare is to disrupt, weaken, persuade, paralyze, compel, or coerce the target. The key element of political warfare is the *intent to influence* in a way that supports national objectives. Political warfare is a

³ Overt executions are openly attributable to the entity executing them, while covert executions are not attributable to a specific actor or are attributable to an actor other than the one executing the activity.

method of conflict employed against an adversary, and therefore, it is a form of warfare akin to irregular and traditional warfare as defined by the US Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁴

Political Warfare in the Spectrum of Conflict

Although some observers would disagree with the use of the term *warfare* as a descriptor for a method of conflict short of armed violence, political warfare, as both a covert and overt activity, lies between peace and irregular warfare in the spectrum of conflict. As it does not involve armed conflict, political warfare presents Russia with a method for engaging adversaries without the risk of a military confrontation, draining critical resources, or severely influencing its national economy. Political warfare alone can be an effective manner of pursuing strategic objectives – but it can also serve, in complimentary fashion, to test and prepare the environment for escalation, if desired, into either irregular and traditional warfare. Political warfare activities include complex combinations of public diplomacy, propaganda, disinformation, as well as economic and political influence. These can be endlessly combined with military and non-military activity as needed to create the response desired. Most political warfare activities, such as propaganda, disinformation, and economic and political influence, can be either overt or covert in their execution, depending on the desired effect on the target.

It is important to make clear what political warfare is and what it is not. Political warfare extends from peace and ends short of armed conflict between national actors or proxies. Political warfare is not irregular warfare, which the US Department of Defense

⁴ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States, Joint Publication 1 (Washington DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, March 25, 2013), II-1, accessed February 11, 2017, http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp1_ch1.pdf?ver=2017-12-23-160207-587.

characterizes as “a violent struggle among state and non-state actors.”⁵ Activities that fall within the realm of irregular warfare, which include insurgency, terrorism, counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, and foreign internal defense,⁶ inherently involve armed violence and, therefore, are not political warfare. Confusion arises when activities associated with political warfare are employed as part of irregular or traditional warfare. For example, when an insurgent group utilizes propaganda to aid their recruiting or when a conventional military unit uses disinformation to mask a tactical movement. This confusion was evident in the Russian annexation of Crimea, when Russian forces used disinformation to increase ambiguity concerning the identity of the troops seizing control of key Crimean facilities. While disinformation is an activity used in political warfare, in the case of the annexation of Crimea, a conventional military force employed disinformation to support a traditional military activity, the invasion of a foreign country.

Political Warfare as a Form of Conflict

The US Joint Chiefs of Staff has defined warfare as “the mechanism, method, or modality of armed conflict against the enemy.”⁷ Dr. Frank Hoffman of the National Defense University believes that Russia’s recent activities against the West do not involve *warfare* as the US has traditionally defined the term. “Kennan’s definition of political warfare is misleading. His concept has little to do with warfare per se; it is

⁵ Joint Publication 1, I-4.

⁶ US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Special Operations, Joint Publication 3-05 (Washington DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, July 16, 2014), II-1, accessed November 27, 2017, http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp3_05.pdf.

⁷ Joint Publication 1, I-4.

largely about non-military efforts associated with subversion or counter-subversion.”⁸

The US dismisses political warfare as a form of warfare at its own peril, as the founding philosophies of its near-peer military adversaries certainly consider it a form of warfare and pursue it with a Clausewitzian zeal.

Because the US only understands warfare in the context of “armed conflict against the enemy,”⁹ it cannot account for political warfare. The US traditionally understands war and peace in terms of a clear dichotomy, and treats the space in between as peace. Therefore, there is no spectrum of conflict. It is a strategic blind spot that allows Russia to act freely. George Kennan opined that the US was “handicapped by a popular attachment to the concept of a basic difference between war and peace, by a tendency to view war as a sort of sporting contest outside of all political context.”¹⁰ In the early 1980s, Joseph Noguee and Robert Donaldson, in comparing the Soviet and American world view regarding international relations, noted “the American assumption of international relations, ..., has tended to view peace as the normal state of affairs with war the exception.”¹¹ Nadia Schadlow more recently noted that the US does not “understand that the space between war and peace is not an empty one – but a landscape churning with political, economic, and security competition that require constant

⁸ Frank Hoffman, “Contemporary Spectrum of Conflict: Protracted, Gray Zone, Ambiguous, and Hybrid Modes of War,” *The Heritage Foundation*, p. 30, accessed November 26, 2017, <http://index.heritage.org/military/2016/essays/contemporary-spectrum-of-conflict/>.

⁹ Joint Publication 1, I-4.

¹⁰ Kennan.

¹¹ Noguee and Donaldson, 34.

attention.”¹² Hoffman notes that other countries, especially Russia, do not see peace and war as a binary condition.¹³

The Background of Soviet Political Warfare

The Soviet Union was founded on a Marxist-Leninist philosophy in which war and conflict are the normal state of affairs in a world of competing social ideologies.¹⁴ The USSR perceived itself to be in a persistent state of conflict against the West in preparation for the world socialist revolution. This concept of continual conflict extends beyond armed conflict into the realm of politics. A key tenant of Leninism “rests of the fundamental premise that all political activity – domestic as well as international – involves conflict.”¹⁵ Lenin adapted Clausewitz’s dictums to the realm of politics. Based on his experiences in the Soviet Union, Kennan postulated that Soviet political warfare was the “logical application of Clausewitz’s doctrine in time of peace.”¹⁶

Communist writings are rife with military terminology such as *battle*, *front*, and *retreat*, when describing traditional political activity.¹⁷ Another disciple of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tse Tung, characterized politics as “war without bloodshed.”¹⁸ In 2003, the Chinese Central Military Commission charged the People’s Liberation Army with conduct of the *Three Warfares*: strategic psychological operations, overt and covert

¹² Nadia Schadlow, “Peace and War: The Space Between,” War on the Rocks (2014), accessed on November 27, 2017, <https://warontherocks.com/2014/08/peace-and-war-the-space-between/>.

¹³ Hoffman, 30.

¹⁴ Nogee and Donaldson, 34.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Kennan.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Mao Tse Tung, “Selected Works of Mao Tse Tung - On Protracted War,” Marxist Internet Archive, accessed December 2, 2017, https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_09.htm.

media manipulation and legal warfare – all techniques of political warfare as defined in this thesis.¹⁹ The Russian Federation has demonstrated this philosophical perspective of continual conflict enmeshed within politics, prompting some academics to postulate that to Russia and China, politics are a continuation of war by other means – reversing Clausewitz’s famous dictum.²⁰

During the Cold War, both the Soviet Union and the US engaged in both overt and covert political warfare. The US covertly funded non-Communist political parties in Europe and Japan, covertly sponsored magazines and organizations to organize artists and intellectuals against Communism, and provided funding and logistics for dissidents behind the Iron Curtain.²¹ Because the US viewed political warfare as exclusively covert and an essential part of the Cold War, it saw no further strategic rationale for its use after the fall of the USSR. Instead, the US and its allies have reverted to public diplomacy and traditional means of carrot and stick diplomacy. Russia’s return to the political warfare model of the Cold War has enjoyed unanticipated success, leading a retired Russian general to exalt: “we really have no reason not to carry on as we are.”²²

Russia’s resurgence is based on asserting its traditional national interests of a great power, even though it is not capable of true great power activity. As compensation, there is a heavy emphasis on the asymmetric advantages of a return to sophisticated

¹⁹ Michael Raska, “China and the ‘Three Warfares,’” *The Diplomat* 18 (2015), accessed December 3, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/12/hybrid-warfare-with-chinese-characteristics-2/>.

²⁰ Brian M. Jenkins, “Strategy: Political Warfare Neglected,” *San Diego Union-Tribune* (2005), accessed on December 2, 2017, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2005/06/strategy-political-warfare-neglected.html>.

²¹ Max Boot and Michael Doran, “Political Warfare: Policy Innovation Memorandum No. 33,” June 2013, accessed on December 3, 2017, <http://www.cfr.org/wars-and-warfare/political-warfare/p30894>.

²² Mark Galeotti, “Controlling Chaos: How Russia Manages its Political War in Europe,” *European Council on Foreign Relations* (2017), accessed January 1, 2018, http://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/controlling_chaos_how_russia_manages_its_political_war_in_europe, 15.

political warfare – now more potent because of global communication capabilities and the opportunity to influence groups directly through manipulating information. As yet unable to understand what it is facing, the US and Western response has been muddled and confused. This is the exact outcome Russia seeks in its political warfare campaign. If the US and NATO is going to limit Russian influence, it is imperative to develop a dedicated effort to counter this political warfare. The first step is to understand the tactics, techniques, and procedures Russia is employing.

Chapter 3: Modern Russian Political Warfare

Modern Russian political warfare, or active measures, consists of five activities which are mutually supportive: propaganda, political control, economic control, public diplomacy, and military intimidation. The first three activities, propaganda, political control, and economic control, can be overt or covert and appear to be the main effort. Public diplomacy and military intimidation appear to be shaping or supporting activities for the main effort. A myriad of Russian entities, not just governmental organizations, are involved in political warfare activities. These entities also leverage networks of witting and unwitting proxy organizations outside of Russia that include pro-Russia political parties, non-governmental organizations, and organized crime syndicates, among others. The activities of these Russian entities and their proxies, however, are loosely controlled and seldom coordinated.

A whole-of-state approach, as opposed to a whole-of-government approach characterizes modern Russian political warfare campaigns. Most Russian corporations and businesses, whether state-owned or not, participate in activities supporting these campaigns as the price of doing business without hindrance in Russia, or in hopes of receiving benefits in the future.¹ Other Russian entities, such as academic think tanks, the orthodox church, non-governmental organizations, and organized crime syndicates all play a role in either facilitating or conducting activities related to campaigning. This marriage of state and non-state actors, plus their witting and unwitting proxies, engaged in a loosely coordinated active measures campaigns not only makes for effective outcomes, it complicates the West's attempts to map networks and assign attribution.

¹ Galeotti, "Controlling Chaos," 4.

For the most part, there appears to be no grand strategy directing political warfare campaigns, just broad intent from the Kremlin to weaken the EU and NATO, distance Europe and the US from each other, and generally create a political environment conducive for Russian interests.² Initiatives seems to be pushed up from below by a variety of actors, both individuals and organizations, based on this broad guidance. Only occasionally are efforts coordinated across platforms, mostly once an initiative picks up traction and appears to be having the desired effect.

This is a clear departure from the manner active measure campaigns were controlled and executed in the Soviet era. During the Cold War, the Politburo established active measure campaigns, leaving the planning and conduct to the International Department (ID) of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) Central Committee, the International Information Department (IID) of the CPSU Central Committee, and Service A, First Chief Directorate of the Committee for State Security (KGB).³ This current reliance on a de-centralized control structure takes advantage of the speed in which information is shared today and assists in masking the impetus of the Russian Federation in launching these efforts.

Current analysis indicates that the Kremlin issues broad strategic guidance and intent, allowing individual entities experiment with tactical executions.⁴ This approach limits Western efforts to collect on active measures campaigns. During the Cold War, clandestine collection on the three entities responsible for the program of active measures campaigns (the ID, IID and Service A-KGB) would have likely yielded information on

² Galeotti, "Controlling Chaos," 3.

³ Shultz and Godson, 20.

⁴ Keith Dickson, "TH 6613: Russia's Use of Force in Georgia and Ukraine" (lecture, Joint Forces Staff College, Norfolk, VA, November 29, 2017).

the themes and activities often before they reached those entities responsible for execution. Today however, clandestine collection on low-level actors acting independently and on their own initiative is exceptionally difficult. In essence, de-centralized control has put open source collection and clandestine collection on a level footing.

De-centralized control also complicates any coordinated Western efforts to disrupt active measures campaigns. During the Cold War, using a clandestine means to target ID, IID and Service A-KGB actions are no longer effective against a modern, tactical-level active measures actor.

Propaganda

Propaganda has been the mainstay of active measures since 1917 and continues to be the main effort of political warfare in modern times. Propaganda is oral or written information which deliberately seeks either to influence or manipulate the opinions and attitudes of a given target group.⁵ Propaganda can be truthful or false information (or a combination of both) and can be distributed through overt or covert methods. There are three elements of active measures propaganda, the form, distribution vehicle, and creator. Propaganda can take various forms, to include: forgeries, disinformation, fake news, social media posts, academic papers, compromised internal emails and correspondence stolen through cyber or traditional espionage, recordings of telephone conversations between EU officials, etc. Dissemination of propaganda can occur through a variety of

⁵ Shultz and Godson, 34.

witting or unwitting distribution vehicles, to include: social media, news organizations, cultural centers, internet web pages, academic institutions such as think-tanks, public diplomacy, etc. Perpetrators, or creators, of Russian propaganda are hard to identify, due to the speed of modern communications, the large number of actors involved, and lack of centralized control.

Modern Russian propaganda has been extremely successful mainly due to two factors, their embrace and expert exploitation of the modern global communication landscape, and a willingness to utilize the fruits of espionage for propaganda purposes.⁶ The modern global communications landscape allows information sharing faster and more efficiently than ever before. Russian propagandists, intelligence services, and the military have embraced this new environment and invested heavily in exploiting it. The Russian Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, General Valery Gerasimov, observed that “the information space opens wide asymmetrical possibilities for reducing the fighting potential of the enemy.”⁷

The Internet Research Agency (IRA) is a Russian private company that stands accused by the US of fielding an army of paid social media users ,or “trolls,” tasked with furthering Russian propaganda.⁸ The IRA is suspected of orchestrating elaborate hoaxes in the US, such as the Columbian Chemicals plant hoax, where journalists, media outlets,

⁶ Max Bergmann and Carolyn Kenney, “War by Other Means, Russian Active Measures and the Weaponization of Information,” *Center for American Progress* (June 2017), accessed September 1, 2017, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2017/06/06/433345/war-by-other-means/>, 8.

⁷ Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying Out Combat Operations," *Military Review* 96.1 (2016), accessed December 1, 2017,

http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/MilitaryReview/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20160228_art008.pdf.

⁸ Tim Lister, Jim Sciutto and Mary Ilyushina, “Exclusive: Putin’s ‘chef,’ the man behind the troll factory,” *CNN Politics* (October 2017), accessed December 1, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/10/17/politics/russian-oligarch-putin-chef-troll-factory/index.html>.

politicians and citizens of Centerville, Louisiana woke to cellular telephone texts and tweets containing news stories and video footage of an alleged explosion at the nearby Columbian Chemicals plant – something that never happened. National US news networks carried the story. The hoax was highly coordinated and intricate, utilizing hundreds of fake social media accounts that posted for hours concerning the explosion. The posts and cellular telephone text messages targeted a list of precisely chosen individuals for maximum impact, to include residents near the chemical plant. Social media posts from IRA-controlled social media accounts included links to cloned websites of Louisiana television stations and newspapers showing coverage of the explosion, which included fabricated videos and witness interviews.⁹

A US Congressional investigation regarding allegations of Russian meddling in the 2016 US presidential election discovered over 3,000 Russian-purchased ads on the social media site Facebook. The ads, which cost approximately \$100,000 to purchase, sought to increase the racial and political divide in the US during an election year. Some ads promoted African American agitation groups such as Black Lives Matter, while other ads accused the same groups of being threats to civil society.¹⁰ Russian trolls also created and participated in fringe social media groups, peddling fake news stories that would enflame group members and motivate them to share the fake news stories. At the height of the 2016 US presidential election, IRA created as many as 50 million social media

⁹ Adrian Chen, “The Agency,” *The New York Times* (June 2015), accessed January 2, 2018, <https://nyti.ms/1AHZ353>. All details of the Columbian Chemicals Hoax, which span three sentences before this one, originated from this article.

¹⁰ Adam Entous, Craig Timberg and Elizabeth Dwoskin, “Russian Operative Used Facebook to Exploit America’s Racial and Religious Divisions,” *The Washington Post* (September 2017), accessed January 2, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/technology/russian-operatives-used-facebook-ads-to-exploit-divisions-over-black-political-activism-and-muslims/2017/09/25/4a011242-a21b-11e7-ade1-76d061d56efa_story.html?utm_term=.7b246b5d5419

posts per month – accounting for botnets or automatic posts and those made by sentient beings behind keyboards.

Russian troll efforts go further than creating and spreading fake news and vitriol. In Sweden, Russian trolls targeted academics and journalists critical of Russia by flooding social media with disparaging comments, or hijacking their social media accounts.¹¹ In Finland, Russian trolls targeted journalist Jessikka Aro after she sought to highlight Russian disinformation efforts. Russian trolls harassed her online and posted fake and slanderous information about her on alternative news websites, and even went as far as organizing a public protest in front of her office.¹²

Through paid social media user, Russia is taking advantage of an already fractured and caustic media environment. Thanks to the ease by which people can disseminate information online, the number of websites that people use to keep informed has expanded. Russian propagandists have taken advantage of this landscape and created or supported alternative news sites by submitting fake content to the websites, or distributing links to Russia-friendly, anti-US stories using a myriad of fake social media accounts. Alternative media websites do not have the same stringent screening criteria that well-established news organizations do, and typically benefit from traffic-driven advertising revenue. These sites are more likely to publish a fake news story unwittingly, simply to create additional traffic for their website. Russian propagandist have taken full advantage of this new for-profit industry and leveraged it in active measures propaganda distribution.

¹¹ Martin Kragh and Sebastian Asberg, “Russia’s Strategy for Influence through Public Diplomacy and Active Measures: the Swedish Case.” *Journal of Strategic Studies* (January 2017), accessed December 1, 2017, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2016.1273830>.

¹² Bergman and Kenney, 13.

The second factor that makes Russian propaganda extremely effective is Russian willingness to utilize the fruit of clandestine collection as part of their propaganda. Paid social media users operating from “troll farms” have a nominal level of sophistication. Russia has invested considerable capital in developing its cyber espionage capabilities and has sanctioned the activities of private hackers in Russia, as long as the hackers focus their efforts on the West and agree to carry out the Kremlin’s bidding.¹³ Russia has demonstrated a willingness to utilize information collected through both sophisticated national technical means and private hackers as part of their active measures propaganda campaigns.

In February 2014, Russia uploaded to YouTube a recording of a telephone call between the US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasia Affairs, Victoria Nuland, and former US Ambassador to Ukraine, Geoffrey Pyatt. Nuland and Pyatt were discussing Ukraine’s leadership transition in the conversation, during which Pyatt said “f-- the EU.”¹⁴ In February 2014, a conversation between the EU foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton and Estonia’s foreign minister, Urmas Paet, was also uploaded to the internet. During the exchange, Paett socialized the theory that the snipers that shot Ukrainian protestors were actually Ukrainian provocateurs. In March 2014, a private telephone conversation was uploaded to the internet in which former Ukrainian prime minister, Yulia Tymoshenko, is heard calling for Ukrainians to arm themselves and kill Russians and their leader. Russia was willing to expose apparently clandestine intelligence collection capabilities to sow discord between the EU and the US and

¹³ Ibid, 10.

¹⁴ Ibid, 9.

demonstrate that the international community was interfering with Ukrainian politics and colluding against Russia.¹⁵

More famously, during the 2016 US presidential election, Russia utilized its cyber espionage tools to gain access to the email accounts of Hillary Clinton campaign advisors and the Democratic National Committee (DNC). Russia piecemealed the release of these emails throughout the 2016 US presidential election. The stolen emails indicated that the DNC was colluding with the Clinton campaign during the Democratic primaries with the goal of having Clinton selected as the Democratic candidate over Senator Bernie Sanders. The US Department of Justice suspects these email releases to be part of a larger active measures campaign to influence the US 2016 presidential election. The website WikiLeaks served as the distribution vehicle for these emails, although it is still unknown whether WikiLeaks was witting that the source of the emails was the Russian government.

The intelligence collection capabilities compromised by the release of the voice recordings and emails are likely not considered Russia's most sensitive collection capabilities. The Russians gained access to the DNC network server using a very common technique called "spear phishing" and intercepting telephone conversations of world leaders, especially in eastern Europe, is no big feat for a competent world power. What is surprising is the willingness to publicize the information.¹⁶ Although Russia officially denies responsibility for both the DNC hacks and the telephone recordings, the international community generally accepts that Russia was behind these activities. It

¹⁵ Eli Lake, "Putin's Latest Dirty Trick: Leaking Private Telephone Calls," *The Daily Beast* (March 2014), accessed December 3, 2017, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/putins-latest-dirty-trick-leaking-private-phone-calls>.

¹⁶ Bergman and Kenney, 9.

demonstrates that even when exposed or highly suspect, Russia demonstrates little fear of the international community reaction, an indication of Russian confidence in achieving its goals through political warfare.

Despite the resources dedicated to troll farms and cyber espionage, official Russian media outlets continue to be the main mouthpiece of the Russian government. While Russia Today (RT) and Sputnik International are well-known distribution vehicles for the official Kremlin position, they also play an integral part in political warfare campaigns by their ability to reach specific target audiences as legitimate media organizations. In addition, RT and Sputnik often seize and amplify feeds from troll farms, which allows stories to get traction in lesser known alternative media sites or social media.

RT and Sputnik News operate online, radio and television stations that broadcast news in dozens of languages. RT has YouTube channels in English, French, Spanish, Russian, German, and Arabic.¹⁷ Sputnik has editions tailored to 31 countries, to include Belorussia, Ossetia, each Baltic country, Kurdish, and Dari among others.¹⁸ RT's online presence and following is impressive, with 2.6 million followers of Twitter, 4 billion hits on YouTube, and an average traffic on its website of 120 million hits per month. These figures do not include viewership of its 24-hour news network, for which RT boasts millions of viewers in 38 different countries.¹⁹ Herein lies the strength of RT and Sputnik

¹⁷ Elizabeth Nelson, Robert Ortung, and Anthony Livshen, "Measuring RT's Impact on YouTube," Russian Analytical Digest, No. 177 (December 2015), accessed December 3, 2017, <http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/RussianAnalyticalDigest177.pdf>, 2.

¹⁸ Sputnik International, "All Editions," <https://www.sputniknews.com> (accessed January 3, 2018).

¹⁹ Fred Weir, "Inside the Belly of Russia's 'Propaganda Machine': A Visit to RT News Channel," Christian Science Monitor (January 2017), accessed December 3, 2017,

News, the ability to reach people where mainstream media cannot, exposing a global audience to Russia-favorable news and disinformation, which is amplified by the activities of the troll farms, which also go out of their way to establish groups or seek membership in groups where people from many different regions of the world conduct online activity.

RT, Sputnik News and troll farms complement each other's work. RT and Sputnik are likely to pick up a story created or distributed by a Russian paid social media user if the story gets traction online. The reverse also holds true, a Russian paid social media user will circulate RT and Sputnik news articles among their social media group and websites. This practice, called *information laundering* has proven effective in several occasions.²⁰ In 2016, Russian social media actors circulated a fake news story about the abduction and rape of a 13-year-old Russian girl by Arab men in Germany. It was not until this story was widely disseminated on social media that official Russian media and the Russian foreign minister cited and further distributed the story.²¹ German police were alerted to the disappearance of a Russian girl in Berlin in January 2016. When the girl finally returned home, she claimed that three Arab men had abducted and raped her. After further investigation by police, the girl admitted to having run away from home because she had gotten in trouble at school and fabricated the story about the abduction and rape. Russian paid social media users seized on the story and promulgated it on social media, stating as fact that Arab migrants had abducted and raped the girl.

<https://www.csmonitor.com/layout/set/print/World/Europe/2017/0117/Inside-the-belly-of-Russia-s-propaganda-machine-A-visit-to-RT-news-channel>.

²⁰ Bergman and Kinney, 18.

²¹ Jim Rutenberg, "RT, Sputnik and Russia's New Theory of War," *The New York Times Magazine* (September 2017), accessed January 3, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/13/magazine/rt-sputnik-and-russias-new-theory-of-war.html>.

After the story gained traction online, Sputnik News ran the story and embellished further, denouncing the German police explanation of the girl running away from home as a police cover-up.²² The Russian government added credibility to the Sputnik cover-up fabrication through public diplomacy. A few days after the release of the cover-up story, the Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, held a news conference in Moscow in which he brought up the Lisa Case, as it became known, and expressed disbelief that the girl had left home voluntarily. This story led to protests in Berlin and coverage by the mainstream German media, which fueled the already heightened tensions among the German people concerning the acceptance of Muslim refugees by the Angela Merkel government. By the time the post-mortem on the Lisa Case concluded, the fake news already had its desired effect.

Right-wing or pro-Russia news organizations outside of Russia also play a role in the distribution, and at times, the creation of Russian active measures propaganda. Breitbart News, an alternative right news organization in the US, has distributed stories originally reported by a Russian news organization such as RT.²³ Fox News, a conservative news organization, reported in March 2016 that former US president Barack Obama had requested the British eavesdropping intelligence agency, GCHQ, collect intelligence on the Trump presidential campaign. RT carried this very same story some days earlier, where a former CIA analyst made the claim based on anonymous sources.

²² Ibid.

²³ Bergman and Kinney, 18.

Fox News later admitted it used the same unsubstantiated source as RT.²⁴ This pattern is also noticeable in pro-Russia and right-wing news organizations in Europe.

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MID), in addition to running the global network of Russian embassies and consulates, sponsors official and semi-official establishments, such as Russian cultural and friendship centers, which have always acted as distribution vehicles for active measures propaganda. The MID also provides funding to pro-Russia non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who support active measures campaigns. As an example, in 2016, the MID through its subordinate entities, paid for representatives of two pro-Russian NGOs, the Legal Information Center for Human Rights, and the Russian School in Estonia, to participate in the annual meeting of the Office of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Law enforcement reporting indicated that these two NGOs presented an overly-bleak picture of the treatment of ethnic Russian children in Estonia.²⁵

Pro-Russia academic think tanks can also be creators and distribution vehicles for Russian active measures propaganda. Academic peer review standards and the intellectually high level of products typically produced make it appear that think tanks are less likely to be subject to influence than news and social media organizations. Nevertheless, they are worth mentioning as potential creators and distributors of active measures propaganda. Russian think tanks, such as the Russian Institute of Strategic

²⁴ Matthew Nussbaum, "How the UK Spying Claim Traveled from an ex-CIA Blogger to Trump's White House," *Politico* (March 2017), accessed December 3, 2017, <https://www.politico.com/story/2017/03/trump-gchq-spying-larry-johnson-intelligence-community-236220>.

²⁵ Galeotti, "Controlling Chaos," 3

Studies (RISI), and intellectuals like Alexander Dugin, are known for pro-Russia lobbying and writings.²⁶

Political Capture

Political capture encompasses activities intended to manipulate a country's political apparatus in the interest of Russian policy. This includes supporting pro-Russia or Russia-agnostic political parties and politicians, preventing the rise of anti-Russia political parties and politicians, and leveraging proxy groups to influence internal political processes. These activities range in intensity from Russian funding of pro-Russia parties or politicians to orchestrating political coups.

Russia supports pro-Russia political parties and politicians throughout Europe in both overt and clandestine fashions. In Western Europe, Russia collaborates and supports pro-Russia parties such as the UK Independence Party, France's National Front, Germany's Alternative for Germany Party, Golden Dawn and Syriza parties in Greece, and Northern League and 5 Star Movement parties in Italy to name a few.²⁷ In eastern and central Europe, Russia supports a myriad of political parties that represent minority Russian-speaking ethnic groups, to include the Harmony party in Latvia and the Center

²⁶ European Stability Initiative, *The Russian Debate on the South Caucasus: Who is Who, Part 2 – Think Tanks and Academia* (Istanbul – Berlin, March 2010), 22, 27, accessed January 3, 2018, http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_-_russia_manual_-_part_2_-_think_tanks.pdf.pdf.

²⁷ Alina Polyakova, Merlene Laruelle, Stefan Meister, and Neil Barnett, "The Kremlin's Trojan Horses: Russian Influence in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom," *Atlantic Counsel* (November 2016), accessed January 5, 2018, http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/publications/The_Kremlins_Trojan_Horses_web_0228_third_edition.pdf; Rick Noack, "The European Parties Accused of Being Influenced by Russia," *The Washington Post* (November 2017), accessed January 5, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/11/17/the-european-parties-accused-of-being-influenced-by-russia/?utm_term=.4fafd4ec1eb7.

party in Estonia. These associations allow Russia varying levels of political and propaganda influence within these countries and provides proxies for active measures campaigns.

Russia leverages proxy groups to manipulate internal political processes through social activism, civil disobedience, or disordering violence. The goal of the manipulation can be to promote pro-Russia policies, destabilize the social order of a country and create disorder to highlight the inefficacy of ruling democracies. As mentioned earlier, these groups can be witting or unwitting to the fact that Russia is directing or sponsoring their activities. The nature of these groups ranges widely, from non-governmental organizations, to social activist groups and right-wing extremist groups. The character of their activities also ranges widely from organizing opposition to government policies to conducting protest rallies. In its most extreme form, Russia can utilize these proxies as the main effort to depose a government, whether by forcing a governmental procedure, or orchestrating a coup.

The Bulgaria Socialist Party, the successor to the Communist party in Bulgaria, likely acting as a Russian proxy, organized a popular protest in 2012 against an initiative by the pro-European government of Bulgarian president Boyko Borisov to have Chevron, a US petroleum company, explore the possibility of mining the shale gas deposits in Bulgaria. The shale mining initiative clearly threatened Russia's energy monopoly, which provides 90 percent of Bulgaria's energy resources. After two weeks of organized protests, which included an expensive media campaign funded by Moscow-affiliated media and advertising companies, Borisov rescinded the Chevron's license and

abandoned the initiative.²⁸ The Bulgaria Socialist Party's sudden interest in the environmental implications of shale gas mining is suspected to be a result of Russian influence.

Following the shale gas protests in January 2012, the Borisov government pursued several initiatives that further threatened Russia's energy monopoly. In January 2013, Borisov canceled a 7 billion Euro project initiated by the previous Bulgarian administration for the construction of a nuclear power plant by Rosatom, a Russian state-owned group. Borisov then awarded a concession for a French-led international consortium to conduct gas exploration off Bulgaria's Black Sea coast. In February 2013, mass protests throughout Bulgaria occurred concerning rising energy costs in the country. Bulgaria officials believe the right wing Ataka party, which played an integral part in organizing and orchestrating the energy protests, received financial support through the Sofia branch of the *Russkiy Mir* foundation, a Russian cultural organization.²⁹ The energy protests eventually forced the Borisov government to resign.

Economic Capture

Economic influence plays an important part in Russia's political warfare campaign, particularly against countries in Russia's declared near-abroad.³⁰ Russia exerts economic pressure in two ways: using the wealth of Russian oligarchs to

²⁸ Kerin Hope, "Bulgarians See Russian Hand in Anti-Shale Protests," *Financial Times* (November 2014), accessed January 4, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/e011d3f6-6507-11e4-ab2d-00144feabdc0>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Kramer.

manipulate (and sometimes dominate) sectoral market dynamics, and by leveraging its position as the main provider of oil and natural gas in eastern Europe.³¹

After the fall of the Soviet Union, individuals in positions of power funneled communist party financial resources to off-shore bank accounts and later used this money to invest in the post-Soviet, burgeoning Russian capitalist economy. For example, some of these individuals purchased state-owned industries with these monies during the privatization of state-owned Soviet industries. These individuals (including Vladimir Putin) are now the oligarchs that control the Russian government and economy. In her book, *Putin's Kleptocracy*, Karen Dawisha sums up the scheme very succinctly: “Assisted by the unscrupulous international offshore banking industry, they [the current oligarchs] stole money that belonged to the Russian state, took it abroad for safety, reinvested it in Russia, and then, piece by piece, took over the state themselves.”³²

Corruption was a part of the process from the beginning, as these oligarchs created rules that favored their business interests as the Russian economy grew. In this corrupt environment and under these skewed rules, Russian oligarchs created businesses that quickly rose to prominence in eastern Europe. Oligarchs took advantage of the 2008 global market crash and used it to expand their business dealings in eastern Europe, promulgating their corrupt methods to countries with young and burgeoning democracies and capitalist markets.³³

³¹ Conley et al.,10.

³² Anne Applebaum, “How He and His Cronies Stole Russia,” *The New York Review of Books* (December 2014), accessed January 4, 2018, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2014/12/18/how-he-and-his-cronies-stole-russia>.

³³ Conley et al.,10.

Russian oligarchs took advantage of the 2008 financial crisis, during which time they expanded their financial investments in eastern Europe. Russian oligarchs currently own banks, telecommunication companies, and a myriad of other companies through eastern Europe. These entities have become major parts of domestic economies, providing direct foreign investment, and contributing to national budgets through tax revenues. This gives the Russian oligarchs levers of influence in these countries. Today, the Russian economic footprint in eastern Europe is considerable – for example, the Russian economic footprint in Hungary and Slovakia is 11 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) while in Bulgaria it is a surprising 22 percent of GDP.³⁴

Eastern and central European countries are estimated to rely on Russia for 75 percent of its energy import needs.³⁵ Russia has utilized this dependency strategically and used its oil and natural gas exports to reward allies and punish adversaries. Georgia, Ukraine, and the Baltic States are prime examples: when these states elected Western-leaning governments, Russia increased energy prices.³⁶ Armenia and Belarus are staunch Russian allies and, not surprisingly, pay the lowest price for Russian energy resources – in 2013, Belarus paid \$166 US dollars per 1,000 cubic meters of gas, while Lithuania paid \$500 US dollars per 1,000 cubic meters.³⁷ Russia has used service interruptions as punitive measures as well. Following the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2006, Russia shut off the gas flow to Ukraine, even though gas to other European countries flowed

³⁴ Conley et al., 11.

³⁵ Radio Free Europe – Radio Liberty, “Gazprom’s Grip: Russia’s Leverage Over Europe,” <https://www.rferl.org/a/gazprom-russia-gas-leverage-europe/25441983.html> (accessed January 4, 2018).

³⁶ Randall Newnham, “Oil, Carrots, and Sticks: Russia’s Energy Resources as a Foreign Policy Tool,” *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Volume 2, Issue 2 (July 2011), 134, accessed January 4, 2018, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S187936651100011X>.

³⁷ Radio Free Europe – Radio Liberty.

through the same pipeline and influenced Russian sales outside of Ukraine. This pressure forced Ukraine to renegotiate the price of gas with Gazprom, the state owned corporation, which then doubled the price per square cubic meter in the new contract.³⁸

Russian state wealth and that of its oligarchs provides Russia with opportunities in eastern Europe, leveraging illegal and corrupt practices to ensure it maintains its level of economic influence. Since Russian wealth and that of its oligarchs provide a major lever of power for Russian active measures campaigns, they should be included in a counter strategy.

Military Intimidation

The Russians, as the Soviets before them, use their conventional forces as part of active measures campaigns. Dr. Mark Galeotti of the European Council on Foreign Relations, has dubbed the Russian use of military force as part of active measures “heavy metal diplomacy.”³⁹ There are four categories of activities that constitute heavy metal diplomacy: threats, war games, deployments, and intrusions. In keeping with the definition of political warfare, none of these activities involve armed conflict, but they are all meant to influence a target audience.

Russia has utilized verbal threats communicated through public diplomacy on several occasions in response to Western diplomatic and military activities. In October 2016, a Russian politician warned Norway that if the country allowed the permanent

³⁸ Newnham, 140.

³⁹ Mark Galeotti, “Heavy Metal Diplomacy: Russia’s Political Use of its Military In Europe Since 2014,” *European Council on Foreign Relations* (December 2016), 1, accessed January 3, 2018, http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/Heavy_Metal_Diplomacy_Final_2.pdf.

placement of 330 US Marines in the country, Russia would add Norway to its list of nuclear targets. A similar threat was made in March 2015 by the Russian ambassador to Denmark, threatening Danish warships with nuclear missiles if Denmark became a part of the NATO ballistic missile defense system.⁴⁰ In 2016, Russian diplomats made it clear that Russia would interpret Swedish or Finnish accession into NATO as a threat to Russia and would “think of a way to eliminate this threat.”⁴¹ Putin and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov repeated these not-so-veiled threat on multiple interviews throughout the year. Russia’s threats have been supported by extensive and well-publicized military maneuvers in the region.

The Russian military has conducted aggressive activity, or “intrusions” as Galeotti calls them, against US and US-allied nations to backstop their bellicose military rhetoric. These intrusions can include high speed – close proximity Russian military aircraft flyovers of warships in international waters, Russian bombers conducting simulated nuclear weapon launches, and high speed - close proximity challenges to surveillance aircraft in international airspace. Other types of intrusions include Russian submarine and combat aircraft in national territorial waters, and Russian surface to air missile radars targeting aircraft in international airspace. While pre-2014 these intrusions were rare and typically tied to a significant event, like British condemnation of the assassination of Russian defector Alexander Litvinenko in London, post 2014 they have become routine. The NATO Baltic Air Policing Force has scrambled aircraft on the average of about 400 per year since 2014 to intercept Russian aircraft. NATO and

⁴⁰ Krag and Asberg, 27.

⁴¹ Damien Sharkov, “Putin Vows Military Response to ‘Eliminate NATO Threat’ if Sweden Joins US-Led Alliance,” *Newsweek* (June 2017), accessed December 3, 2017, <http://www.newsweek.com/vladimir-putin-vows-eliminate-nato-threat-sweden-joins-619486>.

Nordic vessels likewise have responded to Russian naval surface and submarine vessel intrusions. Over the Black Sea, Russian aircraft routinely shadow and take aggressive actions toward NATO surveillance aircraft in international airspace.⁴²

Russian out of area deployments have become more frequent since 2014 and are clearly aimed at demonstrating Russian military capabilities. In late 2016, Russia announced the deployment of Bastion anti-ship cruise missiles, S-400 surface to air missiles, and Iskander short-range ballistic missiles to the Kaliningrad oblast in response to NATO deployment of 7,000 troops to Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, and Bulgaria.⁴³ According to US Navy officials, Russian out of area deployments of its ballistic missile and attack submarines have risen to levels not since the end of the Cold War.⁴⁴ Most prominent has been Russia's out of area deployment to Syria, which was used to showcase a rebuilt military and demonstrate new weaponry, such as the Kalibr cruise missile and Su-34 strike fighter. Russia rapidly deployed a task force into Syria and began conducting strikes on forces opposing Bashar al-Assad.⁴⁵ Russia's largest naval deployment since the 1990s involved Russia's sole aircraft carrier, accompanied by three other ships, sailing through the English Channel and into the Mediterranean Sea to conduct combat operations off the Syrian coast.⁴⁶

⁴² Galeotti, "Heavy Metal Diplomacy," 7.

⁴³ British Broadcasting Company, *Kaliningrad: New Russian Missile Deployment Angers NATO* (London, November 2016), accessed December 15, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38070201>.

⁴⁴ Jim Sciutto, "Top Navy Official: Russian Sub Activity Expands to Cold War Level," *Central News Network* (April 2016), accessed December 15, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/04/15/politics/mark-ferguson-naval-forces-europe-russian-submarines/index.html>.

⁴⁵ Steven Lee Myers and Eric Schmitt, "Russia Uses Syria as Proving Ground, and West Takes Notice," *The New York Times* (October 2015), accessed December 15, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/15/world/middleeast/russian-military-uses-syria-as-proving-ground-and-west-takes-notice.html>.

⁴⁶ Daniel Schearf, "Russia's Navy Deployed to Syria in Show of Force," *Voice of America* (October 2016), accessed January 3, 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/a/russian-navy-deployed-to-syria-in-show-of-force/3560983.html>.

The final aspect of Russian heavy metal diplomacy is its military exercises, mainly the resurgence of the Zapad exercises. A large-scale exercise first conducted at the height of the Cold War, Zapad, originally involved over 100,000 Warsaw Pact troops and served to test new weapons systems, smooth out interoperability among Warsaw Pact members, and display military might.⁴⁷ In 2009, Putin reinvigorated the exercise and expanded it in size to include approximately 12,000 Russian and Belorussian troops.⁴⁸ The exercises always occur in areas near to the Russian and Belorussian borders with NATO countries and the scenarios typically involve the invasion of NATO forces and culminate with the simulated employment of tactical nuclear weapons. In 2009 Warsaw was the target of the mock nuclear strike, and in 2013, it was Sweden. The signal of the Zapad exercise appears to announce Russia's willingness to confront NATO, with the objective of weakening the alliance and dissuade weaker states, while also indirectly threatening Georgia and Ukraine.

Military intimidation is an integral part of active measures campaigns. Russian military threats, exercises, deployments, and incursions serve as a tool to intimidate Western nations and the near abroad. The shows of force presented by the Russian military clearly indicate that by the time NATO takes military action under article V, the Russian army would potentially be deep in NATO territory. While this is improbable,

⁴⁷ Stratfor Worldview, *When Moscow Plays War Games, It Thinks a Few Steps Ahead* (August 2017), accessed December 10, 2017, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/when-moscow-plays-war-games-it-thinks-few-steps-ahead>.

⁴⁸ Vladimir Isachenkov and Ivan Sekretarev, "Putin Attends NATO-Feared Zapad Military Exercise," *DefenseNews* (September 2017), accessed December 10, 2017, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/when-moscow-plays-war-games-it-thinks-few-steps-ahead>.

and NATO would eventually defeat the Russian military, Russian heavy metal diplomacy reminds the world that it is possible.

Conclusion: Strategic Disruption

What the West is observing regarding Russian political warfare is a new normal, which will most likely persist even after Putin turns over control of the Russian government.¹ The strategic culture that has emerged in Russia under Putin is a variation on Soviet methods well known to the West during the Cold War. It is clear that Russian active measures will be an enduring part of the strategic environment; therefore, the response must be equally enduring.

As the Soviet Union did during the Cold War, the Russian Federation has taken advantage of the current strategic environment to disrupt, weaken, persuade, paralyze, compel, and coerce their adversaries through propaganda, political influence, economic influence, and military intimidation. The modern strategic environment, characterized by global information interconnectedness and economic dependence, presents as many opportunities for Russian political warfare as it does for the Western efforts to counter it. The West must take advantage of the interconnected nature of the current strategic environment to expose Russian active measures activities, decrease their effectiveness and impose cost on the perpetrators. Disruption, in a de-centralized control environment, requires a multilateral approach to tackle the high number of actors and volumes of production, and a willingness to share and publicize intelligence information to expose active measures actors and their activities to the public.

The US government requires a concerted and enduring interagency effort to face this modern Russian threat. This is not a new exercise to the US. In 1981, the US

¹ United States Congress, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Hearing on Russian Active Measures and Influence Campaigns, 30 March 2017*, statement of Eugene Rumer, Director of Russia and Eurasia Program, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed August 28, 2017, <https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/os-eumer-033017.pdf>.

Information Agency (USIA) headed the Active Measures Working Group (AMWG), which included members from the DIA, CIA, Department of Justice, FBI, and various department of the State Department.² The AMWG identified Soviet deception, forgeries, or misinformation and exposed them through public diplomacy. A modern attempt to counter Russian active measures requires a more centralized and operational command and control structure, akin to that of the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTF).

A sole US government agency with national intelligence authorities should assume the mission of countering Russian active measures, and create an interagency Russian Active Measures Task Force (RAMTF). The RAMTF would be composed of detailees from across the US government who bring the expertise, resources, and authorities of their parent agencies. This would allow the RAMTF to operate under the authorities of its parent agency and the authorities inherent in its detailed members. The construct of the RAMWG would resemble an FBI JTTF, which are composed of a mix of federal, state, and local law enforcement officers. While control of each individual JTTF falls under the FBI field office of assignment, the officers assigned maintain their federal, state, and local law enforcement authorities and serve as liaisons to their parent agencies.³

The RAMTF would develop a strategic approach to counter Russian active measures, execute activities in pursuit of the strategic approach, and coordinate the activities of other US government entities against Russian active measures. A strategic approach to counter Russian active measures should have a sound and clear mission:

² Michael Dhunjishah, "Countering Propaganda and Disinformation: Bring Back the Active Measures Working Group?" *War Room – US Army War College* (July 2017), accessed January 5, 2018, <https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/articles/countering-propaganda-disinformation-bring-back-active-measures-working-group>.

³ "Joint Terrorism Task Forces," Federal Bureau of Investigation, accessed February 11, 2018, <https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/terrorism/joint-terrorism-task-forces>.

detect, disrupt, neutralize, and deter counter Russian active measures activities. A clear mission directed specifically at Russian active measures activities will ensure that the RAMTF does not stray into conducting political warfare itself. The RAMTF should reside in the CIA or DIA, as both agencies have intelligence and cyber authorities, and enjoy a large presence overseas. Initial RAMTF staffing should include analysts and officers from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Department of State, FBI, Department of Justice, US Cyber Command, and the office of the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs. Additional personnel from across the US government should be added as a strategic approach is developed and a detailed mission analysis conducted.

The RAMTF should enlist the assistance of allied nations by leveraging US Defense Attaché and Department of State relationships and establish a series of bilateral cooperation agreements. These agreements would facilitate the exchange of information concerning Russian active measures activities and provide a vehicle to conduct combined activities against Russian active measures networks affecting allied partners overseas. The RAMTF should coordinate and share its findings with the International Criminal Police Organizations (INTERPOL) to ensure international police organizations are aware of Russian active measures activities and actors.

The RAMTF needs to expand the relationship of the US government with social media websites in order to facilitate the identification of Russian paid social media users and proxy organizations. Select employees of social media companies should be screened for security clearances and fully integrated into the RAMTF. This will permit for more efficient identification of Russian paid social media user, their patterns, and

logistics networks. With this clear mission statement, a strategic approach along three lines of operation should be developed: detect and identify, disrupt and neutralize, and deter.

Detect and Identify

Efforts to counter Russian active measures begin with the detection, identification, and attribution of active measures activities. A robust analytic capability with access to intelligence and open source reporting must drive efforts against Russian active measures. This capability will be essential to detect active measures activities, identify the Russian entity or proxy responsible, and catalogue in detail the tactics, techniques and procedures observed in the execution.

Finite attribution, even down to specific individuals, will be an essential first step. Allied partners will be indispensable in creating a common operating picture of Russian active measure networks, as Russian tend to employ different methods and proxies in different regions of the world.⁴ The RAMTF analytic capability will be the central cog of the task force, as they will become the central repository for all information concerning Russian active measures activities and networks. The process of detecting and identifying active measures activities and their perpetrators will be an on-going process, and opportunities will arise to disrupt, neutralize, or exploit the networks as they become known.

⁴ Galeotti, 6.

Disrupt and Neutralize

Russian political warfare thrives in ambiguity and deception, so the main effort for disruption should be to name and shame active measures actors and their proxies. The AMWG's mantra in the 1980's was *analyze and publicize*.⁵ They created unclassified reports on Soviet disinformation and circulated them throughout the interagency and the press. While the AMWG's efforts centered on exposing Soviet disinformation, modern US efforts need to center on exposing as much as possible the Russian influence and active measures networks.

Prior to publishing, three reviews would have to occur on the information. An intelligence review would ensure that the release of the information would not jeopardize any intelligence sources or methods. A law enforcement review would ensure that criminal prosecution is not an option for the entities mentioned and that publication of the information would not hinder or compromise any ongoing of criminal investigations. The final review would be a robust legal review to assess and mitigate the risk of the US being subject to libel suits with the publication of the information.

The primary means for disruption should be an unclassified, publicly available website with a searchable database cataloging Russian active measures activities, actors, and proxies – to include items of Russian propaganda, their creators and distribution vehicles. This would be an ever-growing database, allowing the public to verify the authenticity of articles or news reports, and verify the affiliation of authors and publishers. It would provide a means for verifying authenticity of social media groups, news organizations, and individuals.

⁵ Dhunjishah.

Periodic reports concerning Russian propaganda should be distributed to public affairs offices (PAO) of US and allied governments, who could utilize these reports when formulating their strategic communication plans to ensure recent accurate information is readily available to the public and fights truth against Russian propaganda. These reports would also inform US and allied partner public diplomacy efforts, to make sure the messages are honed to counter the false narrative of Russian active measures actors.

Analysts should author both event-specific or actor-specific information papers, so long as intelligence sources are not endangered, detailing the evidence indicating that a specific person or organization is or has acted as an unwitting or witting proxy for Russian active measures. These reports would be available on the primary database and distributed to the targeted entity and any relevant parties.

In certain cases, and in conjunction with allied partners, the US should engage in parallel counterintelligence operations to identify and neutralize the Russian clandestine networks which support active measures campaigns and are not readily identifiable through national technical means or open source and intelligence analysis. Once identified and mapped, host nation law enforcement and intelligence entities would have sufficient information to take further action.

Deter

Naming and shaming might deter non-Russian organizations and individuals from continued involvement in active measures activities, but it would likely do little to deter Russia itself from initiating the activities. It is unlikely that the US and its allies can completely deter Russia from engaging in active measures activities, but by imposing

significant costs, it can likely reduce the frequency, intensity, and effectiveness of its political warfare. The US needs the political will to impose the necessary costs on Russia, and this begins with increased and expanded sanctions on Russian oligarchs.

In 2014, the Obama administration imposed economic sanctions on several Russian oligarchs and their companies for their alleged support of the invasion of Crimea. In 2016, the US Congress expanded these sanctions and passed a law limiting the ability of the US president from removing the sanctions without Congressional approval. Economic sanctions targeting Russian oligarch create a real problem for Putin. The oligarchs' support for Putin relies on his ability to protect the wealth they have amassed and their ability to enjoy it. Effective and increasingly stringent sanctions are likely to create friction between Putin and his elites, especially if sanctions are applied on Russian oligarchs tied to organizations involved in active measures activities⁶

The threat posed to the US and its allies by Russian active measures has been evident as of late, and should no longer be ignored. The strategic environment calls for a concerted, enduring effort that will allow the development and execution of a long-term strategic approach executed by an organization with inherent authorities to act quickly against active measures campaign. Such longevity and agility can be effectively achieved by anointing national intelligence agency as lead for the RAMTF. Furthermore, the US should follow the example set by the Reagan administration in the early 1980s, and make countering Russian active measures an enduring priority mission for the US

⁶ Natalie Nougayrede, "The US Sanctions Bill is a Timebomb for Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin," *The Guardian* (November 2017), accessed January 5, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/nov/28/us-sanctions-bill-timebomb-donald-trump-vladimir-putin>.

government akin to counterintelligence. Only an effective and enduring effort to name, shame, and sanction active measures actors will degrade Russian political warfare.

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